



**Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center**

P.O. Box 2139, Ski Hill Road  
Soldotna, AK 99669  
907-262-7021, <http://kenai.fws.gov>

Open: June through August      September through May  
weekdays: 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.      weekdays: 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.  
weekends: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.      weekends: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

**Kenai National Wildlife Refuge  
Visitor Contact Station**

Mile 58 Sterling Highway  
Open: Mid-June through mid-August  
10 a.m. to 4 p.m. - daily

**Emergency Services: 911**

**State of Alaska**

- Department of Fish and Game.....907-262-9368
- Fish and Wildlife Protection.....907-262-4573
- State Forestry.....907-260-4200
- State Parks.....907-262-5581
- State Troopers.....907-262-4453

**Information Centers**

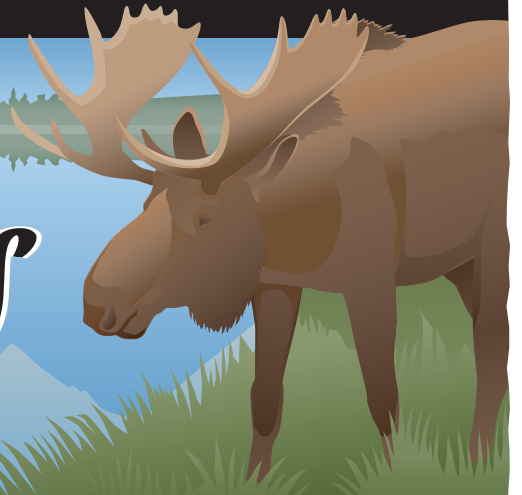
- Alaska Islands and Ocean Visitor Center, Homer.....907-235-6961  
<http://islandsandoocean.org>
- Alaska Public Lands Information Center, Anchorage.....907-271-2737  
[www.nps.gov/aplic/center](http://www.nps.gov/aplic/center)
- Chugach National Forest, Seward.....907-224-3374  
[www.fs.fed.us/r10/chugach](http://www.fs.fed.us/r10/chugach)
- Kenai Fjords National Park, Seward .....907-224-7500  
[www.nps.gov/kefj](http://www.nps.gov/kefj)
- Kenai Visitor and Cultural Center, Kenai.....907-283-1991  
[www.visitkenai.com](http://www.visitkenai.com)
- Soldotna Visitor Information Center.....907-262-1337  
[www.soldotnachamber.com](http://www.soldotnachamber.com)



Kenai National Wildlife Refuge

# Reflections

VISITOR GUIDE



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**Welcome** to Kenai National Wildlife Refuge! Nearly two million acres in size, this is the most visited refuge in Alaska and is characterized by its diverse habitats and wildlife. Moose, bears, wolves, trumpeter swans, and salmon are just a sampling of the variety of wildlife that calls this area home. Wildlife viewing is one of the refuge's key attractions and visitors can observe these animals in alpine tundra, wetlands, and boreal forest.

World-class fishing, camping, and hiking opportunities also draw visitors both from around the world and around Alaska. The Swanson River and Swan Lake canoe systems are one of only two canoe systems in the United States that provide an opportunity to really get into the backcountry and observe wilderness at its most pristine.

Kenai National Wildlife Refuge was first established as the Kenai National Moose Range in 1941 to protect moose. In 1980, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) changed the name and purpose of the refuge. The refuge now exists to protect wildlife populations, the variety of habitats they need to survive, and for you, the visitor, to enjoy.

We hope you will use this guide to get the most out of your visit to the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge.

## Reflections

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Produced and Designed by



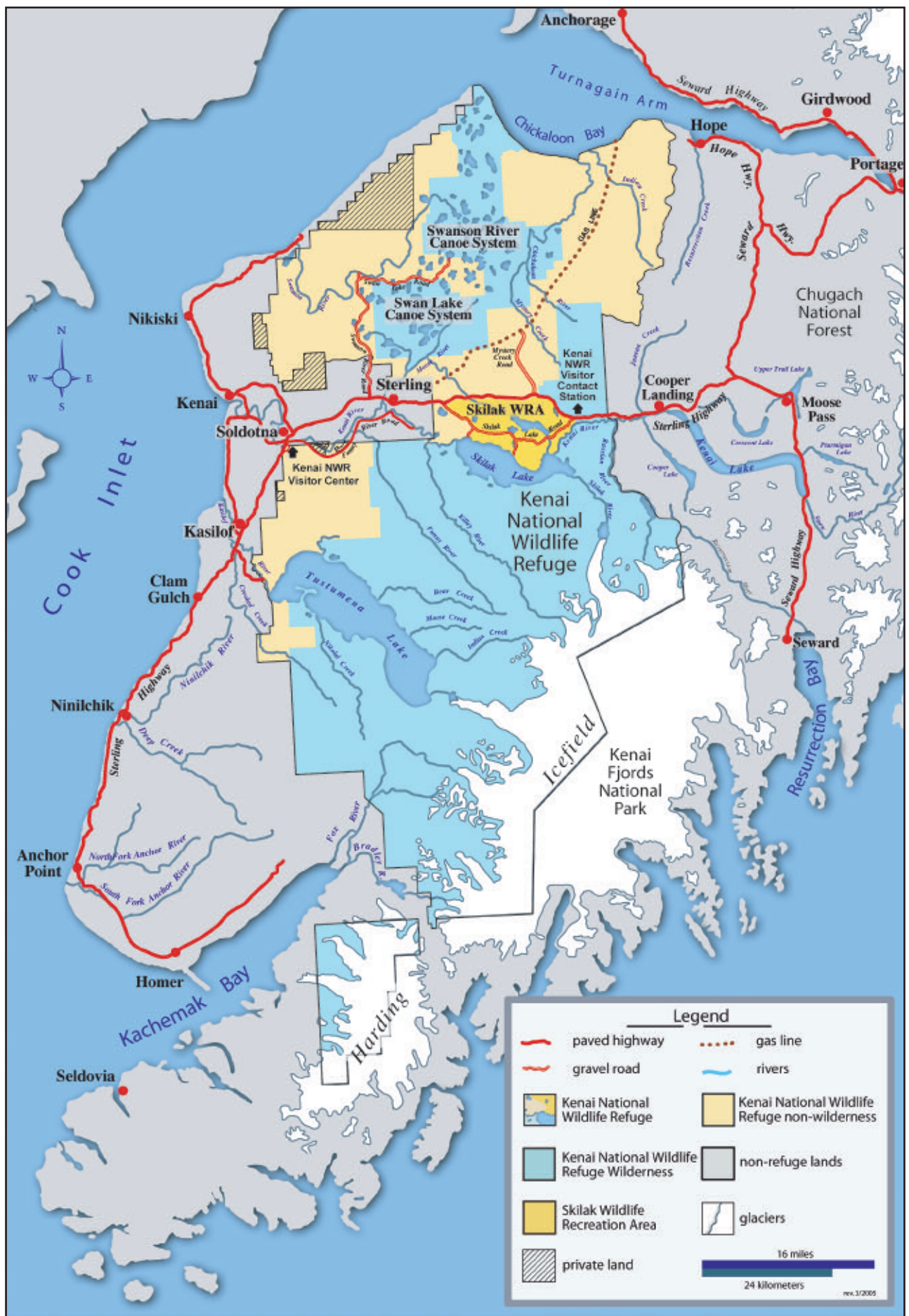
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# Camping and Cabins

Kenai National Wildlife Refuge has a variety of roadside campgrounds. All campsites are on a first-come, first-serve basis. There is no reservation system for refuge campgrounds. Golden Age and Golden Access Passports reduce camping fees by 50% in refuge campgrounds.

Camping may not exceed 14 days in a 30-day period anywhere on the refuge. More restrictive regulations apply to the Russian River and Hidden Lake Areas. Campers may not spend more than 2 days at the Russian River Access Area or 7 consecutive dayss at Hidden Lake Campground.

**Backcountry Camping** is permitted 1/4-mile away from the Sterling Highway, Skilak Lake Road, and Ski Hill Road. Please practice leave no trace ethics.

**Public Use Cabins** are also available for rent with a reservation. For more information call 907-262-7021 or go to <http://kenai.fws.gov>

**Fires** in developed campgrounds are allowed but restricted to grates, barbeques, or stoves. Cutting firewood is permitted, but only dead or down wood may be collected. Attend fires at all times. Completely put out fires before you leave.

**Pets** must be on a leash no longer than nine feet. Owners must be in control of pets at all times and must clean-up pet waste.

Skilak Wildlife Recreation Area Camping (see map on page 8)						
Campgrounds	Number of Units	Drinking Water	Toilets	Trash Pickup	Boat Launch	Nightly Fee
Kenai Russian River	180	✓	✓	✓	✓	\$8-\$10
Kelly Lake	3	✓	✓		✓	Free
Petersen Lake	3	✓	✓		✓	Free
Watson Lake	3	✓	✓		✓	Free
Lower Skilak Lake	14		✓		✓	Free
Engineer Lake	4	✓	✓		✓	Free
Lower Ohmer Lake	3		✓		Canoe	Free
Upper Skilak Lake	25	✓	✓	✓	✓	\$5-\$10
Hidden Lake	44	✓	✓	✓	✓	\$10

# Hiking

## What to Bring

- **Water:** carry 2 quarts. Giardia occurs on the refuge so purify all water.
- **Food:** take high calorie foods. Avoid strong smelling foods that could attract bears.
- **Clothing:** wear sturdy shoes with comfortable socks. Bring hat, gloves, and rain gear.
- **Skin Protection:** bring insect repellent, head net, sun glasses, and sunscreen.
- **Orientation Equipment:** know how to use a map and compass. Know your route and location.
- **Emergency Gear:** a first aid kit, waterproof fire starter, whistle, knife, and signals. Carry a thermal blanket and a cell phone.
- **Toilet Paper and plastic bags:** Pack out all your toilet paper and litter in sealed plastic bags.



## Popular Day Hikes (see map on page 8)

Difficulty	Trail	Length (One way)	Hiking Time (Roundtrip)	Elevation (Roundtrip)	Highest Point	Location
Easy to Moderate	Egumen Lake	0.3 miles	45 min	none	285 feet	Sterling Hwy, mile 70.4
	Hidden Creek	1.3 miles	2 hours	300 feet	500 feet	Skilak Lake Rd, mile 4.6
	Lower Kenai River	2.3 miles	2-4 hours	250 feet	550 feet	Skilak Lake Rd, mile 2.3
	Upper Kenai River	2.8 miles	3-5 hours	260 feet	550 feet	Skilak Lake Rd, mile .6
	Seven Lakes	4.4 miles	4-6 hours	150 feet	440 feet	Skilak Lake Rd, mile 9.4
	Burney's Trail	0.6 miles	1 hour	200 feet	500 feet	Hidden Lake Campground
Moderate	Bear Mountain	0.8 miles	2 hours	400 feet	1300 feet	Skilak Lake Rd, mile 6.0
	Hideout Trail	0.75 miles	2 hours	500 feet	1400 feet	Skilak Lake Rd, mile 1.9
	Skilak Lookout	2.0 miles	3-4 hours	700 feet	1400 feet	Skilak Lake Rd, mile 5.4
Strenuous	Fuller Lakes	2.9 miles	4-6 hours	1700 feet	1700 feet	Sterling Hwy, mile 57
Very Strenuous	Skyline	1.0 miles	3-5 hours	2300 feet	2300 feet	Sterling Hwy, mile 61



# Wildlife Viewing

## Where to Look

- **Alpine Tundra:** In treeless areas starting at 1,500 to 2,000 feet, low growing grasses and plants provide food for Dall sheep, caribou, and marmots. Golden eagles hunt small mammals from the air. Brown bears feast on berries in late summer.
- **Boreal Forest:** Evergreen spruce and hardwoods such as birch, aspen, and cottonwood are home to songbirds, spruce grouse, red squirrels, owls, lynx, moose, and black bear.
- **Wetland:** Bogs, marshes, and muskeg are nesting areas for migratory waterfowl and shorebirds. These birds depend on the abundant insect life found in summer wetlands to feed their young. Caribou and moose eat dwarf birch and willows. Wolves and bears can be observed in these areas hunting for moose calves in spring.
- **Aquatic:** Areas around rivers, lakes, and ponds are home to beaver, muskrat, loons, trumpeter swans, and spawning salmon. Fish, including trout and salmon, attract bald eagles, bears, and river otters.



## Viewing Safely

- **Keep Your Distance:** If an animal alters its behavior because of your presence, you are too close. Responsible visitors use binoculars and telephoto lenses to observe an animal's normal behavior.
- **Respect the Animals:** Animals often respond to repeated interference by abandoning their home, nesting sites, and even their young. Remember that we are the visitors.
- **Never Feed Wildlife:** Animals that become accustomed to human food become problem animals that need to be removed from the area. Don't leave backpacks, trash, or food where an animal might find it.
- **Drive Safely:** When you see wildlife, stop to view them from a safe pullout, not from the roadway. Please do not follow an animal at close distance in your vehicle. Be alert for animals crossing the road, especially at dawn, dusk, and at night.
- **Help Protect the Refuge:** Remind others of their ethical responsibility when viewing wildlife.



## Traveling in Bear Country

- 🐾 Black and brown bears are found throughout the refuge. Be alert and use your senses to evaluate fresh bear sign such as tracks, scat, claw marks, and strong scents.
- 🐾 Make noise to avoid surprising a bear. Be especially careful along noisy streams, in thick brush, and where visibility is poor.
- 🐾 If you see a bear—stay calm. If the bear does not notice you, quietly leave the area from the same direction you arrived. Keep your eyes on the bear. If a bear does notice you, face the bear, wave your arms, and talk to it calmly. Try to appear larger by standing close to others in your group.
- 🐾 If a bear approaches you, stand still. Do not run!
- 🐾 If a bear attacks, fall to the ground and play dead. Lie flat on your stomach, or curl up in a ball with your hands behind your head. Keep your pack on.

## A Common Moosetake

Moose are the most commonly encountered large animals on the refuge. Moose may seem tolerant of human presence, but surprisingly there are more fatal moose encounters than bear encounters in Alaska. The power of a moose's hoof kicking with 1,000 pounds of force can prove deadly.

Moose cows and calves need extra room. In early May, females chase off their yearling calves and are very sensitive to disturbance during the last weeks of their pregnancy. From late May to early June, most calves are born and females remain very protective throughout the summer.

Dogs and moose don't mix. Dogs must be under control at all times to prevent wildlife harassment.



## If You Encounter a Moose

Move away! Maintain 75 feet or more space between yourself and a solitary moose.

Watch for body language. If the moose lowers its head and ears, and the hair on its back and neck stands up, back off.

If a moose charges, retreat behind a large tree or rock. Most moose charges are bluffs and getting behind something solid offers important protection from their sharp, powerful hooves.

Remember, keeping your distance from moose is the best way to avoid a negative encounter.



# Skilak Wildlife Recreation Area







# Skilak Wildlife Recreation Area

Skilak Lake Road was originally built as the Sterling Highway in 1947. Many of the campgrounds along this road were built as camps for the construction crews that built the highway. Trails such as the Seven Lakes Trail were created to link the new highway to the Moose River so people could access new areas for fishing and hunting. Later, the Sterling Highway was straightened, bypassing Skilak Lake Road and creating a 19-mile loop off the present Sterling Highway.

In 1986, the refuge, in partnership with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, designated the Skilak Wildlife Recreation Area to promote wildlife viewing opportunities.



# Skilak Lake Road

Mile	Interest Point	Comments
0.1	Jim's Landing	View bald eagles in tall cottonwoods on the south shore of the Kenai River. Busy boat ramp for drift boat and raft trips.
0.6	Kenai River Trail (East)	Hike in 1/2 mile for a scenic view of the Kenai River Canyon.
1.9	Hideout Trail	This 1.5 mile roundtrip hike offers spectacular views of the Kenai River and Skilak Lake.
2.3	Kenai River Trail (West)	Hike in to see regrowth from the 1991 Pothole Lake Fire. Good area for viewing moose.
2.4	Pothole Lake Fire Overlook	View of area revegetated from the 8,700-acre Pothole Lake Fire of 1991.
3.6	Hidden Lake Campground	Largest and most developed refuge campground. For a 1.2 mile roundtrip scenic hike, take Burney's Trail across from site #7, Skyview Campground Loop. Park in the boat trailer lot. Nice picnic area by lake boat ramp. Campfire programs June through August on Friday and Saturday nights.
4.6	Hidden Creek Trail	Origin of the 1996 Hidden Creek Fire which burned 5,200 acres. Nice cobble beach for picnicking at the end of the trail by Skilak Lake (3 miles roundtrip; lower section of the trail may be wet).
5.1	Hidden Creek Overlook	Outstanding view of Hidden Creek Flats, Kenai River, Skilak Lake, and the glacial outwash area of the Skilak Glacier.
5.4	Skilak Lookout Trail	Heart of the 1996 Hidden Creek Fire. Look for wildlife using the new growth after fire—moose, snowshoe hare, and hawks. At end of trail from the alpine zone, look down to Skilak Lake for a view of gull and cormorant rookeries on the lake's rocky islands. (5 miles roundtrip)
6.0	Bear Mountain Trail	Gains elevation quickly for a scenic view of Skilak Lake at trail's end. (2 miles roundtrip)
8.4	Upper Skilak Campground	Excellent picnic site with views of Skilak Lake and the Kenai Mountains. Developed campground with important boat launch for Skilak Lake.
8.5	Lower Ohmer Lake Campground	Small undeveloped campground. Nice canoeing area with rainbow trout fishing. Look for moose, loons, and beaver.
9.3	Engineer Lake Overlook	Scenic view of Engineer Lake, and west end of Hidden Lake.
9.4	Engineer Lake Campground	Small undeveloped campground area and trailhead for Seven Lakes Trail. Nice lake for canoeing.
13.6	Lower Skilak Campground	Moderate-sized campground and important boat launch for Skilak Lake and Kenai River fishing activities.

Mileage begins at east entrance, see map on page 8.



# Fishing

## Getting Started

Fishing on the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge is a great angling challenge as each body of water has its own unique fish ecology and regulations.

Obtain a current copy of the **Sport Fishing Regulations Summary for Southcentral Alaska** and keep it handy while fishing. The key to using this regulation booklet is first to locate where you want to fish. Then, follow the regulations that apply to each specific area.

You must purchase a valid sport fishing license if you are age 16 or older. These are available at local sporting goods and grocery stores. They can also be purchased online at [www.admin.adfg.state.ak.us/license](http://www.admin.adfg.state.ak.us/license)

If you have detailed questions on fishing regulations, please contact the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) office in Soldotna at 907-262-9368.

For information on the status of fish concentrations and emergency closures use the ADF&G Soldotna Fishery Hotline (updated weekly) at 907-262-2737.



## Fishing Away From the Crowds

Good areas for quiet fishing near the road system are found in small lakes such as Lower Ohmer, Watson, Kelly, Petersen, Forest, Dolly Varden, Rainbow, Paddle, and many areas of the Swan Lake and Swanson River canoe systems. Fishing from a canoe or small inflatable boat is highly recommended to successfully fish for rainbow trout in these waters.

One of the few areas to fish for grayling is Lower Fuller Lakes, a steep 1.5-mile hike from mile 57 of the Sterling Highway.

Hike the Fisherman's Trail upstream from the U.S. Forest Service Russian River Campground, at mile 52.8 of the Sterling Highway, for less crowded red salmon fishing experience.

## Fishing in Bear Country

If a bear approaches you while you have a fish on the line, cut the line and leave the area.

Fish remains attract bears. Toss all fish waste into deep, fast-moving water not in dumpsters or on shore. Cut fish carcasses into small pieces so the water current can carry and disperse them more easily.

When you carry fish out, store them in sealed plastic garbage bags to decrease odors that could attract bears on paths and trails.

Store all food, bait, line and tackle, fishy clothes, and garbage in bear-proof containers in your vehicle.

Avoid fishing during times of low visibility (dawn, dusk, and at night) to prevent bear encounters.

Always keep your dog on a leash and under control to prevent negative bear encounters.

## Russian River

Located at mile 55 on the Sterling Highway, the Russian River Access Area is the most popular fishing area on Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. Two red salmon runs occur separately in June and July, and one silver salmon run in August. This bank fishing area is accessed by foot or by ferry. The Russian River Ferry takes people across the river to fish the confluence of the Russian and Kenai rivers and along the south bank of the Kenai River. These areas have the most concentrated fish runs.

This fishery is a very social experience and is often referred to as “combat fishing.” When salmon runs peak, people fish shoulder-to-shoulder to land 5 to 12-pound red salmon. On the south bank adjacent to the ferry, a portion of the bank is reserved for mobility-challenged anglers. The Russian River Access Area, ferry, and the adjacent Sportsman's Boat Launch are fee areas operated by a private contractor. Golden Age and Golden Access passport cardholders receive discounts on 24-hour parking and ferry fees, but not on boat launch fees.

## Moose Range Meadows

The refuge manages several fishing platforms on the north bank of the Kenai River on Keystone Drive outside Soldotna. These platforms were established to allow fishing and also to protect fragile bank habitat essential to the rearing of young salmon. Platforms open to salmon fishing beginning July 1 each year. From Kenai River mile 25 to 273, these platforms are the only legal areas in Moose Range Meadows to fish from July 1 to August 15.

## For More Information

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# Canoeing in the Refuge

The Swan Lake and Swanson River canoe systems (see map page 3) cover over 100 miles in the northern lowlands of the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. One of the best ways to see the refuge and its wildlife is to paddle one of the many routes offered here. From easy family weekend trips to weeklong adventures, paddlers of all abilities and ages will enjoy this unique wilderness experience.

## What to Expect

Lakes break up in mid-May and stay open until mid-October. Lake waters are cold (50-60 degrees F.). Canoeists need to be prepared if they capsize in cold water.

Head for shore during high wind conditions and be prepared to wait for better weather.

Portages range from several hundred yards to a mile or more. Travel light and use a good canoe yoke. Realize you hike as much as you paddle on the canoe trails. Carry an extra paddle to insure safety.

Biting insects are often present on portages and at campsites. Bring repellent and head nets.

Narrow rivers, like Swanson and Moose, require paddlers to maneuver tight oxbows and to avoid rocks and brush. These rivers require intermediate level skills.

Campsites are not designated. To reduce impact, choose sites that have been previously developed.

## Canoe System Regulations

- Canoeists must register at the entrance where they embark.
- Group size is limited to 15 people. Smaller groups of 2 to 8 are recommended to reduce human impact.
- All boaters are required to wear life jackets.
- No motorized watercraft.
- Wheeled vehicles such as canoe carts and mountain bikes are not allowed.
- Power equipment, such as generators and chain saws, is not allowed.
- Fishing and hunting in season are permitted on the canoe systems.
- Fireworks are prohibited.

**For detailed trip planning, information, and maps, visit the refuge visitor centers. See the back page for more information.**



# Refuge Partners

For more information on Kenai National Wildlife Refuge's wildlife, geology, and natural history, look to the Alaska Natural History Association. As the principal nonprofit educational partner of Alaska's public lands, Alaska Natural History operates bookstores with an extensive collection of materials on Alaska's natural and cultural heritage.

Look for our bookstore in the Kenai Refuge Visitor Center in Soldotna. Your purchases support educational programs offered by rangers, volunteer programs, this visitor guide, and other services.

Alaska Natural History partners with more than 30 public lands across Alaska to operate informational bookstores and connect people to Alaska's rich natural and cultural heritage. Building a community dedicated to the future of Alaska's parks, forests, and refuges is at the core of our mission. Through bookstore revenues, membership dues, and donor contributions, we are able to play a vital role in connecting more people to Alaska's rich public lands. To find out more or to become a member, visit the Kenai National Refuge visitor centers or take a look at [www.alaskanha.org](http://www.alaskanha.org)



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## Planning Your Trip

Stop by the refuge visitor center in Soldotna to find these useful guides. In addition to books, visitors will also find maps, journals, posters, field bags, and more.



### Alaska's Kenai Peninsula: A Traveler's Guide

By Andromeda Romano-Lax

This pocket-size guide is filled with color photos and easy-to-read sidebars on the natural and human history of this special area.

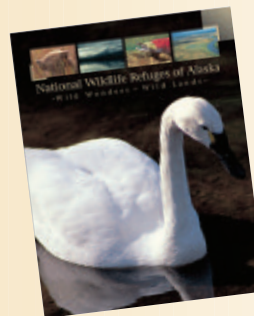
**\$12.95**



### Birding the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge

By Alaska Natural History Association  
Part birding guide, part hiking guide, this functional resource highlights commonly sighted birds and where they can be found along the trails. Includes detailed descriptions of trails in the refuge.

**\$5.95**



### National Wildlife Refuges of Alaska: Wild Wonders, Wild Lands

By Elaine Rhode

Discover each of Alaska's 16 national wildlife refuges and the natural wonders they offer in this stunning pictorial essay.

**\$9.95**



### Kenai Trails

By Alaska Natural History Association

Grab your pack and head to the Kenai to explore the rich variety of trails with this new, full-color comprehensive trail guide. Includes detailed trail descriptions and maps.

**\$7.95**

Also available on-line at [www.alaskanha.org](http://www.alaskanha.org)